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New page

Chapter III,

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION,

Ancestral Family ---- Village Community ---- Family ---- Kinship Terms ---- Slaves

As in other

In any primitive community, an investigator expects to find that the social, religious, and economic aspects of culture are interdependent, and are further among the Bella Coola

complicated by the influence of ~~tional~~ in

true among the Bella Coola, but an additional complexity is the manner in which mythological concepts influence even their social life. This not only complicates investigation in the field, but it also renders a logical description of their customs difficult, rather. It is impossible to avoid, entirely, Some references to practices recorded in detail in later chapters, although every effort has been made to reduce these to a minimum. unavoidable.

In describing many communities, ethnologists have been able to begin with what is fundamental, in every case, the social organization of the people. Among the Bella Coola this is impossible, since their religious beliefs colour every It

aspect of their life, and these must be understood by anyone who wishes to comprehend their culture as a whole. In this chapter, too, it is necessary to commence with a description of that aspect of mythology which serves as the cohesive bond to one of the social units, the ancestral family.

THE ANCESTRAL FAMILY (10 pt. Goldfarb C+T-C) (13)

~~As recorded in the last chapter,~~ (It is believed that) in the beginning of time Älquntäm caused the first men and women to be created in his house above and sent them down to populate the earth. They came in groups of two, three, four, or more brothers and sisters, or more rarely man and wife, to different parts of ~~the~~ Bella Coola valley. They brought with them tools, houses, clothing, even sustenance in the shape of fish and animals. More important, from the viewpoint of social organization, they brought with them names and ceremonial prerogatives. In fact, the Bella Coola believe that their culture was created by Älquntäm in the distant past, and has not been the result of slow growth. It is true that there have been many changes. Raven, the culture hero, taught the early settlers many useful arts, and they were themselves ~~so~~ powerful ~~that they were able~~ enough to create ceremonial and other prerogatives in a manner impossible to their descendants. Moreover, the ~~Bella Coola~~ people realize that they have been influenced by neighbouring tribes since ~~the~~ that xxxx time, but ~~that their ancestors reached this earth. But~~ in spite of these additions, they ~~modern Bella Coola~~ believe that ~~his~~ their life is patterned on that of ~~his first~~ their earliest forbears.

according to the Bella Coola, a product of slow growth. There have been additions, particularly of rites obtained by marriages with the members of neighbouring tribes, and the first ancestors were so powerful and so closely in contact with the supernatural beings that they could perform rites of their which modern man is incapable, but fundamentally the life of the modern Bella Coola is patterned on that of his first forbears.

Considering the tribe as a whole, it may be said that they are philosophers. They demand a reason for everything, though once a reason has been given, and accepted, they think no more about the matter. Unquestionably, the elaborate mythology of the Bella Coola was evolved to explain their social organization, but it is equally without question that these myths, now accepted as facts, have had a great influence on the lives of the people, and that the social structure of the tribe has tended to conform to the myths.

Each group of first people formed a village community, and pre-empted hunting-grounds in the vicinity. These usually consisted of small valleys opening from the main Bella Coola River, tracts which could thus be easily defined. Each group also took possession of a suitable part of the river for a salmon-weir, or, if located on the coast, a convenient place for an ocean fish-trap. In course of time the first people married, of neccessity with the members of other villages. According to the myths, and equally according to modern Bella Coola practice, the women usually moved to the villages of their husbands. When a child was born, it naturally grew up to share in the hunting-grounds of its father's village. Moreover, the father was able to bestow on his child various ceremonial dances, the concepts of some he had brought with him from above, and others he had formulated on this earth. It is assumed that all the first people were mighty chiefs, and thereby able to initiate dances in a way that few modern men have

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It would be difficult and pedantic, as well as useless, to attempt to differentiate between practises carried out entirely in 1922 -24, and those performed in part, and those which had not been done for a few years. Consequently, the present tense has been used throughout this monograph for descriptions of rites both of the present and recent past.

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been able to equal. But the mothers of these children, the first ~~ones~~ born on this earth, ~~according to the Bella Coola~~, did not surrender the ~~rites~~ privileges of their own villages at marriage. Consequently, their children were of almost as much interest to the brothers and other relatives of their mothers as to their fathers. It was taken as a matter of course that a child ~~would~~ had full rights in the village of his mother, and from her, ~~and~~ as from her relatives, he likewise received dance prerogatives. Thus each child was a member of a bi-lateral ~~grouping~~ social group. From actual residence in his father's village ~~a child~~ he tended to be more intimately associated with him, and his brothers, than with his mother's relatives, but this did not prevent him from visiting at the home of the latter where he was received as a member of the village. Through the bestowal of dance prerogatives by his mother and the members of her family, his relationship with them was further emphasized. Such a child was, in fact, a full member of two groups.

When the ~~members~~ members of the ~~third~~ second generation married and begot children, each of these ~~must~~ could have been a member of four groups; that of his father's father, father's mother, mother's father, and mother's mother. ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ The Bella Coola belive that there were approximately forty-five groups of first settlers, ~~according~~ corresponding to the forty-five towns, and it is obvious that if the system of intermarriage had continued for a few generations, a man would have been a member of each of these first groups. ~~It is always assumed by the Bella Coola~~ They that their first ancestors came to this earth at a period far more remote than a few generations ago, and yet at the present time no ~~Bella Coola~~ one claims to be a descendant of more than eight of these first groups, while most claim descent from only two or three. In part this can be explained by ~~forgetting~~ dulness, though a Bella Coola would regard this statement as heresy. The ~~continuous~~ residence of a man in the village of ~~his~~ his father has tended to emphasize relationship with the ancestral group that first populated his village, and there is no doubt that actual relationship, ~~with~~ through the mother, with the members of other groups must often have been forgotten in the course of generations. The writer uses the term, ancestral family,(1) to designate those individuals who believe themselves to be descended from one of the first groups that populated this earth.

As has been said, a man may claim descent from as many as eight of these

(1) Memmints in Bella Coola.

~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ groups, that is, he may be a member of eight ancestral families. It is clear that some restrictive means must have been employed to limit the choice of marriage partners, otherwise a man's membership in ancestral families would have been far greater than it is. The process of forgetting is immaterial; ~~xxxxxx~~ a man may be ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ in reality descended from many diverse groups, but as far as social organization is concerned he is a member of only a limited number of ancestral families, ~~And this chapter deals with~~ and it is social organization, not ~~with~~ physical anthropology ~~that this chapter deals~~. is the subject of this chapter.

The explanation lies in the high regard with which the members of an ancestral family esteem the prerogatives they have received from their first ancestors. Returning to a consideration of the first settlements on this earth, it is clear that with the marriage of the first women, their brothers were called upon to share their rights, both practical in regard to hunting territory, and ceremonial with regard to dance prerogatives, ~~among~~ with their sisters' children. Bella Coola mythology contains no references to unwillingness ~~of~~ on the part of the first men ~~to~~ to do this ~~share their rights~~, in fact, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ their own children were benefitting equally ~~thereby~~ from ~~xxxxxx~~ the marriages of their fathers with other women. But, say the Bella Coola, after these first marriages, necessarily exogamic, men realised that it would be foolish to allow their children to marry far afield and so transmit valuable prerogatives. It was far wiser for a man to seek as future son-in-law ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ a youth belonging to the same ancestral family as himself or his wife. Then any resultant children would come into this world provided by both parents with common relatives, so that the child would be, as they express it, "Held close and supported by a close circle of ancestors".

It will be noticed that Bella Coola logic does not explain how the marriages of the first generations could have been arranged without violating the laws of incest. The principle endogamic, however, has been carried out until the present day, so that a man endeavors to arrange marriages for his children with members of the same ancestral family. One of the strongest Bella Coola ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ desires is to "make good the path" for his children, and this can best be done when they are born to find themselves amply provided with relatives of common descent. There is

no belief in the active participation of distant ancestors in the affairs of men, yet, though incapable of clear expression, the Bella Coola feel strongly that a child is born into the companionship of its deceased relatives back to the beginning of time. This endogatic principle will be described in greater detail in Chapter VII, merely it has been necessary to mention it here to explain the composition of the ancestral family.

In recent years some Bella Coola have endeavored to marry foreign women in order that they, or their children, might obtain new prerogatives. Thus a trend towards exogamy has arisen from the same reason which led to endogamy. It is obvious that the offspring of such marriages cannot always enjoy the feeling of strength and comfort that comes from the membership of the physical support of relatives the same relatives from in the same ancestral family, both parents, but some men have felt that this was offset by the gain of highly desirable foreign prerogatives. It is said that this practice was initiated by a certain Peltes, father of a Bella Coola now about sixty years of age. It is probable that white influence had nothing to do with this radical innovation, although its wide adoption since that time has been made more easy by the establishment of peaceful conditions on the coast.

Strong as is the belief in a common ancestry, it is unlikely that this would have sufficed to hold together the members of the ancestral family, without some definite prerogatives. These are of two kinds —

(A) Names. (B) Land.

Names.

The fundamental principle which governs all names Bella Coola names is that each must have originated with respect to some event of comparative importance. It is unthinkable to apply a casual designation to a child. With it a person's death his name, or names, may be transmitted to a relative, and it is proper that the owner of a name should know when, by whom, and for what reason, it was first created. Before coming to this earth the first people were all given names by Alquntäin, and these names have since been carefully transmitted and are still in use. No one name can be given to two individuals; instances occur of two people having the same name, but in such cases they have different origins. One person may have several

names of different kinds, each carrying with it some prerogative of a dance or other function, but all are transmissable, and at the owner's death these fall to different relatives. The only non-inheritable appelations are those obtained by shamans as a result of their supernatural experiences.

A name may be transmitted from man to woman, or vice versa, in some tribes with a minor alteration. The name itself.

Not only did each group of first settlers bring with them a number of designations from above, but they also created a number on this earth and bestowed them on their children, and on the children of their sisters or brothers, in whom they felt an almost parental interest. To mark the dignity of the names all present received at the ceremony of bestowal gifts from the creator of the name, the person who called them together for the rite. The importance of the individual depended largely upon the value of the goods distributed with respect to his name, a concept which will be elaborated in the following chapter. The descendants of these first people likewise created new designations, and established their dignity by distribution of presents, a practice which has been continued until the present day. It follows that any complete origin myth should include a large number of names, those brought down from the land above, and also those created by the powerful first people on this earth itself. Both types of cognomen will be referred to henceforth as "ancestral names", no distinction being made between those actually brought from above and those made on earth. This is in accordance with Bella Coola usage.

Soon after the birth of a child his father, uncle, either on the paternal or maternal side, or other near relative calls the members of the village together to bestow a name on the infant. The one selected must be embodied in the origin myth of one or other of the parents, and must be one not then in use by any other member of the ancestral family. A relative may give the child one of his own names, in which case the donor surrenders all claim to it. This designation is the outward mark of the position of the child in the ancestral family. Without such a formal conferring of an ancestral name an infant would be without status in the community, but, as children are always welcome, some relative is invariably ready to confirm the bestowal by the necessary distribution of goods, a feature that is present in every Bella Coola ceremonial. On this occasion the guests are called by their ancestral names. The writer endeavored to learn what an appeal was made

(1). Such a name is (sm̓ɬ as sk̓watsta, "Petrified name".)
(2). Such a name is (sxwa'it'a sk̓watsta, "Earth-made name")
(3). The most careful investigation failed to show that it was incumbent on any particular relative.

would happen if the number of children born into an ancestral family exceeded the number of names ancestral names extolled in its origin myth, but, we was to be expected, no answer was forthcoming. The established custom demands that a name be provided for every child, and an one is always provided. Without question names must be invented, usually from some event in the origin myth, but it is always claimed that such a name was used by a long deceased ancestor. In fact, the social custom agrees with the requirements of the mythological account. Since the bestowal of names is a matter of pride, it follows that a child often receives several from the ancestral families of which he is a member.

An ancestral name given to a child is spoken of as an ätsa'ututä name, and the recipient as an ätsa'ututä, which may be translated, "commoner." He may be given several names from one origin myth, or names from different origin myths if his parents are members of different ancestral families. These names may either be those actually brought down from above by the first people, those made on this earth by them, or those made at some important event by later persons. Irrespective of what combination of these possibilities a child may have, he is still a commoner, and his ability to rise from the position to that of chief depends on his own, or his parents', ability to give potlatches, as will be described in the next chapter. In such a case his ätsa'ututä name is said to have been elevated to that of a stä'ltsmx (chief's) name.

The ancestral family may therefore be defined as those whose ätsa'ututä names are extolled in the same origin myth.

What is the stability of this group?

In consequence of the large number of names theoretically extolled in every myth, and of the necessity for validating the bestowal of some of these by means of presents, it follows that there are always a large number of dormant names. The Bella Coola describe these as being, "In the burial ground". They are in fact, dead. Anyone of these names can be resurrected by any member of the ancestral family. If a woman marries into a foreign tribe her relatives will occasionally give her husband an ancestral name, outright, In such a case that name is permanently alienated from the ancestral family to which it belonged; formerly this should only happen when an ancestral family is reduced to a few individuals, all of whom agree to the transaction. But more often a woman takes an

does not mean the name is resurrected.

a wedding gift to her husband a name which it is understood cannot be transmitted to one of his relatives unless he has children. On the death of the children husband his name reverts to his widow's ancestral family. If there are children, they cement the bond of friendship between the two families. The brother of a woman so married also bestows names of her children, as further mark of their incorporation in to their mother's ancestral family. But it is customary and proper for the ancestral family into which a woman is married and bears children, to reciprocate the compliment a few generations later, and by the marriage of one of their women to restore such names to the ancestral family to which they originally belong. ed. "This practice according to the Bella Coola of "return-marriage" has been the rule for generations, since the first exogamic marriages of the first people, with the result that names usually return to the descendants, traced patrilineally, of the first people to use them.

If a woman who marries outside her ancestral family, bears her children, it is difficult to say for, will, of course, belong to at least two distinct ancestral groups. How long an individual remembers the different groups to which her is related, is difficult to say, but the following is an instance of survival for several generations. Qwai'lits is an orphan about ten years of age, now living in Bella Coola; he is looked upon with considerable respect as being a member of ancestral families in Bella Coola, Kimsquit, Smith's Inlet, Kitkatla and Kitlobe. The following pedigree explains his powers. The symbol = marks a marriage, and the male is shown on the left in each case.

Sqwli = ?
Bella Coola Smith's Inlet.

Kwalais = ?
Bella Coola.

? = ?
Kimsquit

? = ?
Kitkatla Kitlobe.

? ?

Qwai'lits

Theoretically, Qwai'lits is as much a native of Smith's Inlet as he is of Bella Coola where his father made his home. If he should visit Smith's Inlet and make known his pedigree, he would be welcomed by the members of the ancestral family

of his great-great-grandmother.(1) His welcome would be more assured if he were the owner of a name from their origin myth. Difficulties of communication, increased by frequent wars between different tribes, made it virtually impossible in the old days to keep touch with relatives in distant tribes, except in the case of a mighty chief who was able to invite visitors from great distances to feasts. Thus names taken by women to foreign husbandswere virtually lost to the members of her ancestral family. In course of a few generations, such designations carried afield would be revived as if dormant by some member of the family, and all recollection of the foreign marriage forgotten.

The converse of this process of loss, is the assimilation to an origin myth of names originally brought into the ancestral family by a woman coming from abroad. Unless intercourse and friendly relations were maintained by "return marriages," it would be found in a few generations that no tradition was remembered to account for the name, and this, if used at all, would naturally be interwoven into the well-known ancestral myth. Hence a myth is not static with regard to the names embodied in it. These change from generation to generation, and it is probable that elements of the story itself suffer like additions and alterations.

The Bella Coola regard the ancestral family as a social unit, not only in terms of the present, but as stretching back to the first settlement of the earth. Viewed from this angle, it is in fact, though not admitted to be so by the Bella Coola, a uni-lateral grouping with patrilineal descent, which may, in recent generations, be marked by matrilineal descent instead. A man frequently uses prerogatives obtained through his mother, her mother, or even her mother's mother, but it is tacitly assumed that in previous generations such rights passed in the patrilineal line ~~from the first settlers of this earth. Moreover, in some cases it is believed that some prerogatives were transmitted matrilineally in recorded marriages at the beginning of time.~~

(1). At the present time the Bella Coola are living in a single village, hence it was impossible to obtain a modern instance of the ownership by one individual of rights in a number of localities. It appears certain, however, that the sentiment expressed with regard to Qwai lits at Smith's Inlet are identical with those formerly held for possessions in ancestral families located in different Bella Coola villages.

In case?

the members of the group. The first point to be emphasized is that the ancestral family is a unit held together without definite social mechanism. There is no accepted "head" of the family, nor are there any clearly formulated laws governing the transmission of the name prerogatives. Before death a man usually calls together his relatives and bequeaths[1], according to his desire, his personal property in slaves, and canoes, and his intangible property in names. But such a designation does not become the property of the new owner unless he is able to validate his ownership by a distribution of presents; meanwhile the name is "dead". If, during this period, some other member of the ancestral family should desire it for a child, or for himself, he can take possession of it by the customary distribution of presents. In doing so he would anger the legatee, but the latter cannot himself use the appellation since it is already in use. Even at the present time there are bitter quarrels over the assumption of names, and such have certainly occurred for many generations. If a man can promptly validate a name willed to him, it is most unusual for anyone else to try to forestall him.

If a man dies intestate, his sons consider themselves his normal heirs, and the most respected of them validates for himself as many names as he desires or is able to assume. Disputes are not as common as might be expected since the influence of a chief is usually sufficient to settle claims as to which of his brothers shall receive which name. Even if none of them is a chief, some one of them is certain to have greater influence than the others. If a dead man has no sons, his daughters can assume his names, which they may transmit to their children. Failing both sons and daughters, a man's brothers and sisters are his heirs, as usual, the one of influence being the one who really arranges matters.[2] None the less, it must be emphasized that if the members of the immediate family are slow to validate a dead man's names, they may be taken by any member of the ancestral family.

1. In case of sudden death or failure to make a will confusion always follows.
2. At the present time the name principal governs the disposal of houses and gardens on the reserve.

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In former days it was customary to create a "remembrancer" whose duty it was to remember the ancestral myth. The elder and more influential members of the ancestral family were accustomed to choose some intelligent and young relative to whom to relate the myth in great detail. One informant described how her mother, the last official "remembrancer," had been instructed by her grandfather. The old man had been accustomed to take his granddaughter, a girl about twelve years of age, to bed with him, and whisper to her the myth, with his hand pressed over her mouth to prevent the escape of his words. At the conclusion of the recitation he always spat in her ears to make the words stick. The members of the ancestral family, recognizing that the remembrancer was the person best acquainted with the myth, were wont to consult him or her about it, and of course about the names embodied in it. A remembrancer had no authority to decree who should receive names, but ~~his~~ decisions were often made to him, and a tactful individual was often able to settle disputes.

Considering the extreme fluidity of the whole system it is surprising that quarrels are not ~~even~~ more common. On the one hand these are ~~limited~~ restrained by the system of wills, ~~by~~ through which a man bequeaths his most valuable personal property, especially his intangible property in kusiut name-prerogatives! Ancestral names ~~may~~ are also ~~be~~ willed but since the value of these depends on the goods expended to validate them, there is little advantage in having even one of the names which came from above in the beginning of time. Indeed a chief who is the legal owner of such a name will often choose to elevate his position with respect to a title of comparatively recent date. But if any person who is not a member of the ancestral family should dare to use an ancestral name, then all the members rise to avenge the theft, for such they feel it to be. Names are sometimes lent, or hired to those who are not members of ~~in return to the individual, not~~ the ancestral family, for definite sums. The recipient recompenses the individual, not the group. If ~~these~~ names are not returned for several generations quarrels are apt to arise ~~through the claim of~~ by the recipient

(1). See page .

In recent years this practice has become comparatively common. A man, eager to share in the glories of a myth and able to give a potlatch, was often validated in this way as ancestral names to which he has no right. The presence of the white man alone restrains the incensed ancestral family.

claims to be the real owner of the name, ~~and~~ not the temporary possessor. During his tenancy of the name he is entitled to any prerogative attached ~~thereto~~ to it, but is not considered a bona fide member of the ancestral family.

~~Ikx~~ Instances have occurred in which an old man or woman, ~~deserted by his relatives,~~ believes himself to be the last survivior of an ancestral family, ~~He may then bestow~~ has donated his names and ~~the~~ myth to those who have ~~hxf~~ befriended him, or ~~they~~ these ~~may be~~ have been taken by those who bury him. Some individuals are constantly watching to bury friendless old people in the hope of so obtaining names. But in almost every case this leads to friction, since it is virtually impossible for an ancestral family ever to die out. Perhaps in the next generation, perhaps in the following one, some youth will claim to be descended from the first ancestors of the supposedly defunct family, and accordingly lay claim to the myth and names embodied therein. This automatically leads to a feud with the person, or his descendants, who has laid claim to the names through aid given to the "last" of the family.

When we turn from these rare instances of an ancestral family becoming practically extinct, to the ancestral family as it usually exists, largely centred in one village, but with members scattered in ~~a few~~ other localities, we find no central organization. It is generally recognized that a family belongs in the village where its first ancestors settled, and the leading chief of that village is thus ~~comes to have~~ an important ~~position~~ person in the family. But he has no status as "head" of it. His advice may be appealed to in cases of disputes concerning names, but he lacks any judicial authority. Theoretically, ~~the~~ descendants of the elder of two first people are considered as "elder brothers and elder sisters" of those descended from a younger brother or sister, but this is nothing more than an accepted fact, it plays no part in the social life of the community.

Before leaving the subject of names, it ~~mxghtxhaxmxkk~~ is advisable to refer briefly to ~~mothers type of name~~ found in origin myths, namely, those ~~of~~ applied to dogs. The first ancestral groups had dogs, and these dogs had names, or were given them by their powerful masters. Ever since that time, these names ~~can be applied~~ their descendants can apply to their dogs ~~by their descendants~~. It is unnecessary to validate the name of a dogx, but no two canines can be given the same name at the same time, according to the same rule which governs the bestowal of human names. The writer failed to investigate

This matter was not investigated in detail, and the only dog's name collected was one for which the origin myth is as follows:

When Täl·ic was first settled in the beginning of time, the houses were built in parallel rows, one above the other, up the side of a steep knoll. At the very top was a toilet-house, built over such a steep incline that excrement rolled down the hillside. In consequence, one of the early chiefs living there gave to his dog the name, Nuliq̓wɛmutɬ di mɛnk; "Rolling excrement", which has since been preserved in the ancestral family of his descendants.

Land

Great difficulty was experienced in obtaining information about land tenure. The Bella Coola resent keenly the way in which their land has been occupied by white settlers without, according to their standpoint, proper compensation. Questions on this subject always excited them, but every effort was made to verify the following statements.